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DE RUEHOU #0427/01 1411706
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201706Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3701
RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC 0053
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 0130

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 OUAGADOUGOU 000427

AF/W EMILY PLUMB, JASON HUTCHISON
OES/E/ETC CHRISTINE DAWSON
DEPT PASS EPA FOR OIA/MARTIN DIEU, OPPT/CHARLIE AUER

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [EMIN](#) [SENV](#) [GH](#) [UV](#) [CH](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: BURKINA FASO: ESTH DEVELOPMENTS IN MINING, WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION, ECO-TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

¶1. SUMMARY: During a May 9-14 mission to Burkina Faso, the Regional Environmental Officer (REO) met with Government of Burkina Faso (GOBF) officials (Bureau of Mines and Geology, Ministry of Environment, National Tourism Board) and the International Institute for Water and Environmental Engineering to discuss government initiatives for mining, wildlife conservation, eco-tourism, and environmental education. END SUMMARY.

Mining

¶2. According to Mr. Pascal Deindere, Director General (DG), of the Bureau of Mines, the 2004 mining code revisions mandate best management practices for all industrial mining concessions. All industrial mining projects must be developed under the guidelines of a comprehensive activity plan that includes environmental impact assessments and mine closure plans with site rehabilitation projects. Mr. Pascal spoke of the necessity for balanced regulation to both promote international investment in the mining sector, and ensure that mining companies operate as good environmental stewards.

¶3. The DG spoke positively of progress made on the industrial mining front, but described the artisanal gold mining sector as difficult and complicated. Artisanal or informal mining occurs in more than 200 sites throughout the country, and is destructive to the landscape/habitat, hazardous to human health, and remains outside the realm of government regulation. The lack of regulatory capacity is cause for concern because use of mercury and arsenic is widespread throughout the informal gold mining sector. The DG said the illegal chemicals are supplied in Ghana by the Chinese and cross border mercury trafficking continues due to lack of border surveillance, inspection and control.

¶4. On May 15, EconOff traveled to Essakane, one of the country's largest artisanal mining sites located near the Burkina Faso- Niger border. The vast site was covered with hundreds of piles of dirt dug from open pits ranging from 50 to 100 meters in depth. Children and livestock were running through the site while miners either worked deep in pits or knee-deep in muddy water. Workers admitted to using drugs in order to have the courage and stamina to carry on their daily tasks. They also claimed that severe health problems plagued the community primarily in the form of respiratory ailments caused by inhalation of the dust. Despite confirmation of mercury use by Burkinabe officials, workers refused to admit to use of illegal chemicals in their mining practices.

¶5. COMMENT: The use of mercury threatens the health of those who come in direct contact with the heavy metal, as well as potentially contaminating groundwater and food supply (agricultural, domestic livestock, and wild species) adjacent to these mining sites. The GOBF should be encouraged to develop and enforce legislation to control the illegal trafficking and use of mercury in artisanal gold mining operations and should also be encouraged to engage their

counterparts in Ghana on this issue. Although the GOBF has developed a plan to deal with illegal mining that includes site reclamation and reeducation of the local population, they lack the capacity, expertise and financial resources to carry it out in the foreseeable future. END COMMENT.

Wildlife

16. The Director of Ecology for Flora and Fauna, Mr. Rigobert Bayala, was happy to discuss conservation programs, and acknowledged the need for improved capacity for national park and reserve management, game law enforcement, and public education for increased awareness and cooperation to prevent illegal hunting and reduce human/wildlife conflict. The Director noted human/wildlife conflict to be a growing concern and on May 7, 2008 the local press, "Le Pays," reported ongoing human/elephant encounters that resulted in the deaths of several elephants after a small troop of elephants took up residence in the near three villages in the Tiefora region. The Director stressed the need for improved education and community cooperation for successful management of human/wildlife conflict. Mr. Bayala is now on a trans-boundary mission to evaluate the regional eco-tourism potential of the Arli National Park, sharing borders with Benin and Niger.

17. COMMENT: Historically, Burkinabe grazing livestock have been allowed to cross into Panjeri National Park (Benin) causing stress on the wildlife habitat and potentially impacting the park's eco-tourism business according to Beninese wildlife managers. It will be interesting to learn if errant grazing herd animals will impact the desired results of the tripartite trans-boundary mission. The final report is scheduled to be delivered at the beginning of

OUAGADOUGO 00000427 002 OF 002

June 2008 and Mr. Bayala said he would be glad to share information. END COMMENT.

Eco-Tourism, Including Role of Taiwan

18. Mr. Souleman Ouedraogo, Director General (DG) of the Office of National Tourism for the Ministry of Tourism, said the GOBF is very concerned with Burkina Faso's image in the international eco-tourism sector. He was happy to discuss the upcoming and expanded (increased from 9 to 15 countries) fifth annual International Tourism and Hotelier convention scheduled for September 2008 as well as highlight numerous eco-tourism attractions in Burkina Faso. When asked, he seemed to be aware of the impact artisanal mining has on the landscape, less aware of the connection between good environmental stewardship and the positive impact it can have on the eco-tourism sector. He was reluctant to discuss the potential damage that irresponsible mining practices have on human health and eco-system health and ultimately the image of the eco-tourism sector. After further discussion, he noted the need for greater awareness and involvement, if only to be given a chance to review initiatives for consideration of potential linkages to the eco-tourism sector/image.

19. When asked about Chinese influence in the country, the DG said Burkina Faso could see increased Chinese investment in agriculture, health and perhaps infrastructure. Mr. Ouedraogo also mentioned Taiwanese investment in a 2 billion CFA (US 2.36 million), industrial and eco-tourism center near Tenkodogo which is scheduled to be completed in December 2008. The center will include hydroelectric power generation, rice crop production, fish meal production for export, guest bungalows, swimming facilities and a 3 kilometer artificial beach. (COMMENT: Burkina Faso is currently one of only four countries in Africa with diplomatic ties with Taipei. Investment from mainland China into Burkina Faso will likely remain limited until Ouagadougou shifts diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing. END COMMENT.)

Environmental Education

10. The International Institute for Water and Environmental

Engineering (2IE) is a 40 year old institution dedicated to education, training and research. The institute offers education and certification at the bachelors, masters and PHD levels with programs in water, energy, the environment and infrastructure. The institute receives support from various sources including the European Community, Switzerland and Canada. Mr. Paul Ginies, Director General (DG), and Mr. Amadou Maiga, Deputy Director General (DDG), are committed to expanding the programs at the institute, while at the same time developing education, research and professional capacity in Africa. The DG and the DDG are interested in developing collaborative efforts for improved potable water development, water collection and transport systems, remote sensing, renewable energy (Bio-mass), renewable construction materials, sanitation and solid waste management. (COMMENT: The institution shows promise as another avenue for USG outreach in general, and specifically for increased outreach into primarily Muslim communities in Burkina Faso and the region. U.S. English Language Fellow (ELF) professors have been assigned to 2IE for the last three years and will be in place for one more. Given the success of this program, post has requested a bi-lingual Fulbright position for 2009-2010 academic year.) END COMMENT.)

JACKSON